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ABSTRACT

A reflective coaching program was implemented to improve the professional work culture of a school district with morale problems because of labor disputes and strikes. An underlying principle of the program emphasized the role of teachers as the key instructional decision-makers for the classroom. The guiding principle for the teacher-coach relationship was reflective self-analysis whereby coach and teacher engaged in ongoing dialogue about the interpretations and implications of classroom data. The coach's role was supportive, fostering the teacher's self-analysis and reflection in an objective and nonjudgmental manner. Ten content workshops addressed a variety of teaching models and research-based knowledge about teaching and learning. The reflective coaching workshops were utilized to provide knowledge and practice in not only data collection but also in active listening, non-judgmental ways of discussing observation data, and pre- and post-conference skills. Ten doctoral students, all experienced classroom teachers, served as peer coaches during the program's first year. Evaluation of the first year was based upon participant self-reports as well as classroom data collected by peer coaches. Outcomes are described in relation to five areas: (1) changes in thinking about teaching; (2) changes in teaching behavior; (3) benefits to students; (4) benefits to district; and (5) comparison with other inservice programs. Recommendations are made for districts considering the implementation of a peer coaching program. (JD)

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THE EVOLUTION OF A REFLECTIVE COACHING PROGRAM: SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

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THE EVOLUTION OF A REFLECTIVE COACHING PROGRAM: SCHOOL-UNIVERSITY COLLABORATION FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Design and implementation of a reflective coaching program by a school-university partnership are described. First-year outcomes are explained largely in the words of the teacher-participants.

Introduction

In an important, recent article Sparks and Loucks-Horsley (1989) identified the need for increased knowledge of ways that staff development "contributes to teacher professionalism and teacher leadership" (p. 55). The following article describes the design and implementation of a reflective coaching program that was intended to improve the professional work culture of a district that had been characterized by collective bargaining disputes and strikes. Participant evaluations of the program's initial year are described, along with recommendations for districts that are considering the implementation of a peer coaching program.

Program Design

The original impetus for this program arose from teacher and administrator concern over pervasive morale problems that were both cause and effect of a series of collective bargaining disputes and bitter strikes. This semi-rural, county-wide district of 500 teachers formed a staff development committee of teachers and administrators which spent a year visiting and studying a variety of ongoing staff development programs.

Near the end of the year of visitations and study, the committee issued a request for proposals from regional universities and staff development consultants for a program that would incorporate both content workshops focused on current research and theory on teaching and learning and follow-up coaching. Peer coaching programs that the

committee had observed and favored utilized some form of technical coaching, a model of coaching whereby the peer coach provides feedback on the degree of teacher implementation of prescribed teaching techniques (Garmston, 1987; Williamson & Russell, 1990).

The initial group of participants in the program were to include twenty-five teachers and five administrators. Half of the participants would be drawn from the staff development committee, all of whom wished to participate. The remaining half of the group would come from volunteers. All teachers participants were experienced elementary and secondary teacher veterans whose teaching experience ranged from six to twenty-seven years. Administrator participants included two principals, two assistant principals, and one central office supervisor.

In contrast to the technical coaching model in which the committee was originally interested, the authors proposed a reflective coaching program that was built around two guiding principles:

1. An underlying principle of the reflective coaching program emphasized the role of the teacher as the key instructional decision-maker for his or her classroom. The program would promote self-direction and self-reflection on curriculum and instructional decisions and behavior, rather than focus on techniques prescribed by other educators. Hargreaves and Dawe (cited in Fullan, 1990,

pp. 15-16) capture the distinction between the reflective and technical models quite eloquently. They describe reflective coaching as a "tool of teacher empowerment and professional enhancement, bringing colleagues and their expertise together to generate critical yet also practically-grounded reflection on what they do as a basis for wiser, more skilled action." In contrast, technical coaching emphasizes the role of the teacher as technician along with "smooth and uncritical adoption of preferred forms of action (new teaching styles) introduced and imposed by experts from elsewhere."

2. The guiding principle for the teacher-coach relationship would be reflective self-analysis whereby the coach serves as a second pair of eyes and ears in the classroom to collect teacher-selected data and engage with the teacher in ongoing dialogue about the interpretations and implications of classroom data. Rather than providing positive or negative feedback and evaluation as in the technical model, the reflective coach's role would be to support and foster the teacher's self-analysis and reflection as objectively and non-judgmentally as possible.

Current theory and research on teaching and learning would be presented in 10 workshops spaced throughout the academic year. Five additional workshop days would be used for training in reflective peer coaching which applies the principles and strategies of clinical supervision (Cogan, 1973; Goldhammer, 1969) to peer observation and coaching and emphasizes teacher self-reflection and direction.

1. The 10 content workshops would address a variety of teaching models and research-based knowledge about teaching and learning, some of which had been identified in the request for proposals while others were suggested by the authors. Content workshops were proposed to include such topics as information processing theory, teacher expectations, explicit teaching, thinking skills instruction, cooperative learning, and learning styles. The purpose of these workshops would be to provide basic knowledge and skills on a particular topic; further inquiry and experimentation with a particular topic would depend upon the professional judgment of the individual teacher with the facilitation and support of the reflective coach.

2. The reflective coaching workshops were to be utilized to provide knowledge and practice in not only data collection but also in active listening, non-judgmental ways of discussing observation data, and pre- and post-conference skills. Data collection techniques to be studied would include such techniques as verbal flow, seating chart techniques, selective verbatim, scripting, formal instruments such as Flanders Interaction Analysis System, as well as ways of developing data collection techniques that were responsive to specific teacher concerns.

Ten doctoral students, all of whom were experienced classroom teachers, would serve as peer coaches during the program's first year. The doctoral students were preparing for careers in public and higher education in curriculum and supervision and had all been previously grounded in systematic observation and clinical supervision. As the initial group of district participants would include 25 teachers and five administrators, each doctoral student would coach three participants. At least 10 classroom observations, including pre- and post-conferences, would be completed for each district participant.

Following lengthy review of the reflective coaching proposal, along with consideration of numerous other technical coaching models that were proposed, the committee was attracted to reflective coaching's emphasis on the classroom teacher as the key instructional decision-maker in the classroom. Members recognized the potential for reflective coaching to affect positively professional esteem and efficacy.

A three-month-long period of negotiations and dialogue ensued during which the committee and authors collaboratively planned the first year. It was agreed upon that approximately two content workshop days would be devoted to cooperative planning of the program's second year when first-year participants would serve as peer coaches themselves.

Implementation

The first workshop was held in September and was followed by the initial day of classroom observations which provided opportunity for teachers and coaches to become acquainted and to introduce students to a visitor who would return repeatedly to their classroom. Initial pre- and post-conferences focused upon the teacher's espoused teaching platform as the teacher and coach explored the beliefs, understandings, and commitments which framed the teacher's work.

As the program unfolded, some teachers experienced frustration with their coaches' unwillingness to provide

evaluative feedback during post-conferences. Familiar with the technical model of peer coaching, these teachers preferred specific feedback focused on their implementation of desired teaching behaviors. As per the previously-stated principle of non-evaluative and reflective coaching, however, the doctoral students consistently sought out the teachers' perceptions and reactions based upon data collected during observations. Those data included such teacher-selected foci as wait time one and two, student-teacher verbal interactions, teacher use of higher- and lower-level questions, and other low-inference classroom data.

In January, a mid-year evaluation was completed which indicated that early teacher frustration with the emphasis on reflective rather than technical coaching had begun to wane. Participants also expressed their desire for more information on the reflective coaching process as they looked ahead to the second year of the program when they would assume responsibility for coaching colleagues who would be entering the program for the first time.

During the second half of the year, workshops focused on the coaching process itself and provided both knowledge and practice in effective ways for gathering classroom data. Additionally, with the support of the authors, first-year participants designed the program's second year which would introduce 50 of their colleagues to the program under the leadership of the district's first Coordinator of Staff

Development. The coordinator was selected from a pool of five of the first-year teacher-participants who applied for the position in April.

First-year Outcomes

Evaluation of the program's first year was based upon participant self-reports as well as classroom data collected by peer coaches. Outcomes are described in relation to five areas.

1. Changes in thinking about teaching

One of the major purposes of this reflective coaching program was to encourage teachers to become more inquiring and thoughtful about what they do in the classroom and why. The most commonly reported change in teacher thinking was that teachers were thinking more about their teaching behavior and their students' learning:

> The greatest change in my thinking about teaching is just that. I think about how and why and what I teach. I reflect on each lesson I teach and make mental and physical notes on it. I think about what I did well, what wasn't so good, and how I can improve on it. (Teacher H)
>
> Dare I use the word reflective! I shall! I definitely have become a more "consciously aware" teacher. The day-to-day decisions that I make in the classroom are more deliberate and thoughtful. (Teacher O)
>
> My thinking has shifted from concerns of content--to which is the best model to use to teach a given concept

to the particular group of children I have. (Teacher T)

Teachers also stated that they more carefully planned and evaluated the outcomes of their teaching both during and following a lesson. As these teachers' locus of control became increasingly internalized, their sense of efficacy in focusing on their intentions in the classroom blossomed. Repeatedly, teachers described themselves as more reflective and more intentional in their planning and self-analysis. In other cases, teachers reported no change of focus in their thinking about teaching, yet did indicate improvement:

> My thinking about teaching has not really changed. I still feel my task is to teach students how to question and how to organize their thoughts. If anything, my approach to how I accomplish this task has changed. I've gained new insights as to how to develop questions and how to be more attuned to student thought processes in order to get them to think and question. (Teacher G)

2. Changes in teaching behavior

Teachers reported numerous examples of changes in their teaching behavior which were also supported by classroom data collected during observations. As explained above, the following examples reflect teacher-selected emphases for observation and improvement:

> I have increased my wait time, and my movement within the classroom. I have actually structured some cooperative learning situations, which have proven very worthwhile. My lessons are beginning to show more

concern for thinking skills. (Teacher A)

I have spent more time in walking around the room to check students when they are doing written work, and I am constantly using the various techniques we have discussed to provide feedback very often. (Teacher D)

I am not tied so tightly to the lesson plans--if I discover a "hole" in their understanding. I try to fill it even if it means my "Wednesday lesson" is put off until Friday. I also am doing more of what I regard as experimentation: I'll alter sequences of activities and lessons to try to discover a way to teach a concept with more clarity for the students. (Teacher E)

Not only did Teacher E experiment with new ideas and approaches in her classroom, she also reported that she learned about her teaching from her students:

I have learned many, many things from my students by asking them to write about artwork, the art concepts, the art processes, and their feelings as they work on their projects. My behavior has changed because I took the time to try a different way and step back to observe the results. (Teacher E)

Other teachers reported similar parallels between changes in their own behavior and thinking and their students'. Not only did teachers think more often and more deeply themselves, they expected the same of their students.

> I try to include several higher level questions in my discussions with my students--asking them to compare and contrast or analyze a situation--to get them used to using thinking skills not just memory. (Teacher L)

Additionally, teachers reported that as they gained confidence in their ability to learn and apply new knowledge and skills, their professional esteem blossomed.

> I notice things such as whether I have called on everyone every period. I try to sample all the children's knowledge instead of just plodding through and hoping that everyone understood it the way I presented it. I am also more aware than ever of the mistakes I make but now instead of kicking myself over them, I realize my mistake and take definite steps to change that behavior or practice. (Teacher N)

3. Benefits to students

As explained above, the major initial purpose of this program was to improve the professional culture of this faculty by modeling and encouraging inquiry into teaching and stimulating more disciplined reflection on the teacher's behavior in the classroom. As the program continues now in its second year, one test of its effectiveness will be the commitment and willingness of participants to observe and evaluate carefully and systematically student cognitive and affective learning. At the end of the first year, participant self-reports of benefits to students included such observations as the following:

> My students have a more energetic and enthusiastic teacher who is doing the best teaching job he has ever done. The enthusiasm I got from the program has spilled over into my classroom. (Teacher K)

Several other teachers echoed the benefits of their enthusiasm for their students:

> They're getting a better teacher. Somebody who is willing to learn and willing to make changes. A person who has their education as a number one priority. Students don't need a dull, stagnant teacher who is counting the years until he can retire. (Teacher P)
>
> I decided early in the year to include them by telling them what I had learned after each meeting or coaching experience. I felt that I provided a role model for encouraging them to learn how to be a better student and that all people need to continue their education. (Teacher S)

4. Benefits to district

Many participants cited benefits identified above as positive outcomes for the district. Others referred to the low professional morale that had characterized the district for some time and identified this program as an important step in improving the teaching and learning culture.

> I see an opportunity for them to finally provide meaningful inservice training and thereby gain the support of the staff in this project. I think it will raise teachers' self-esteem and that perhaps will

> go a long way toward changing the pervasive negativism that we have experienced in [district name] for many years. (Teacher L)
>
> The district has benefitted by helping to provide an excellent environment in which its teachers are able to grow. (Teacher H)

Others were more personally focused in the benefits they saw for the district:

> The district now has an older teacher that has a renewed interest and drive to improve himself and the district as a whole. I will be able to pass this renewal on to other professionals within the district. (Teacher A)

One of the more memorable observations of the year came from a participant who viewed the experience with mixed feelings:

> I find that this year has totally exhausted me, and each day when I go home, I am more tired than I have ever been before in teaching. However, the difference is that I know I'm doing the best job I can and that is largely due to the reflective process which we underwent in this program. (Teacher D)

5. Comparison with other inservice programs

Participants cited continuity and follow-up, emphasis on practice, teacher involvement and control, and mutual respect as significant qualities which highlighted their experiences in the reflective coaching program:

> This program has been like no other inservice I have attended. I was an active participant instead of a head that was talked at. This program confirms my belief that successful inservice requires the active participation of the professional staff. (Teacher A)
>
> Other programs bombard us with theory, but offer no opportunity for practice or for feedback. All inservice programs should be geared to teacher needs. (Teacher B)
>
> I have never participated in a valuable inservice before. Our programs have always lacked any thread of continuity. (Teacher F)
>
> This program has had teacher input from the start which I feel good about. Our thoughts and concerns have always been listened to in all the decisions that had to be made. (Teacher I)
>
> I felt a freedom to express feelings, questions, concerns, ideas, and a mutual comradeship. (Teacher R)

As these teachers' comments attest, participants felt a shared ownership in the reflective coaching process that they had not previously experienced. As their sense of ownership grew, motivation and excitement about teaching correspondingly increased. The following teacher's evaluation of the experience eloquently speaks to new-found enthusiasm for professional learning. Comparing the reflective coaching program to previous inservice, this participant wrote:

> They were one-day experiences. We were given some information. There was never any way to question how it could be adapted K-12. We could never try it and then discuss it with someone as we have with our peer coach. Programs did not provide for the different personality styles of teachers. Programs did not provide for the fact that everyone cannot adapt a concept to their teaching style, or to their classroom of children, or to their subject matter just because it works well for the speaker. We were usually treated as people without knowledge, or without common sense. We were just a room full of people to spend their appointed time with. The [reflective coaching] program provided information, stategies, practice, companionship in the classroom, reflection and personal choices of what suited me, my personality, my philosophy of education, and most important, the little ones in my classroom. (Teacher T)

Not only did this teacher express enthusiasm for the reflective coaching process, she described a new level of professional confidence and esteem:

> As a result of this program, I would help to try to change inservice days into programs where teachers have an opportunity to talk and learn from each other. I'd urge others to reflect enough to separate what they think is correct in education from what textbook writers, government departments, school boards, parents

and administrators have forced them to think is right. (Teacher T)

Recommendations

As the above self-evaluations attest, first-year participants in this program discovered new levels of professional commitment to teaching and ongoing learning. All of them willingly volunteered to continue their participation in their new role of peer coach during the program's second year. Based upon their evaluations, we offer the following recommendations to districts that wish to develop a peer coaching program that is focused on improving the professional teaching culture.

1. Invite teacher input and ownership from the very beginning of a new program. These teachers indicated that teacher involvement from the "ground up" in program design and implementation was crucial to their commitment and sense of ownership of the program.

2. While commitment to collaboratively-developed program goals is important, it is also essential to respond to areas of conflict and confusion openly and immediately. The mid-year evaluations indicated a need for focused attention to reflective coaching knowledge and skills. This need was addressed earlier than had been originally planned. When early tensions over technical versus reflective coaching surfaced, they were also dealt with openly by the entire group. We believe this openness contributed to teacher perceptions of an atmosphere of honesty and trust.

Additionally, when one is attempting to introduce a complex innovation into a school, one should expect, indeed hope for, early problems in implementation. When complex innovations experience smooth implementation in the early stages, it is generally not a sign that things are going well. Rather, it is likely a sign that the innovation has been "watered down" for smooth implementation. This "watering down" actually will tend to reduce the potential benefits of the innovation (Fullan, 1990).

3. The reflective coaching model emphasizes teacher latitude in determining the focus of observations. The need for teacher latitude and ownership cannot be overstressed. Teachers repeatedly noted the sense of professional esteem they derived from this emphasis. As noted above, they relished the opportunity to inquire into, and experiment with, their teaching.

4. While teachers valued the emphasis on reflection, they also stressed the need for ongoing attention to practical skill development. They found their reflective coach invaluable in supporting their self-selected foci for expanding their teaching repertoire.

5. If a district is considering including administrators in the peer coaching program, it is essential to recognize the special challenges building principals face in attempting to teach regularly. The four principals included in this group found it nearly impossible to teach regularly because of administrative responsibilities.

Special attention needs to be given to ways of freeing up principals so they can actively participate.

Conclusion

As Duke (1990) has noted, staff and professional development may be distinguished from one another by professional development's emphasis on individual freedom, uniqueness, judgment, and virtuosity. In contrast staff development is oriented to group goals which spur collective growth towards the achievement of those goals. In keeping with the norms of development programs that are successful in fostering collegiality along with personal self-actualization (Shroyer, 1990), the reflective coaching process described above sought to integrate the best of both models of ongoing learning by improving the professional culture of a faculty by fostering increased levels of inquiry, experimentation, and reflection. As the teachers' own words attest, the program's first year was successful in enhancing the professional esteem and motivation of a group of veteran teachers. We suggest that districts with similar concerns about professional morale give serious consideration of reflective coaching.

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ABST_A description is given of a reflective coaching program designed to improve the professional work culture of a district that had morale problems because of labor disputes and strikes. An underlying principle of the reflective coaching program emphasized the role of the teachers as the key instructional decision makers for the classroom. The guiding principle for the teacher-coach relationship was reflective self-analysis whereby the coach engaged with the teacher in ongoing dialogue about the interpretations and implications of classroom data. The coach's role was supportive, fostering the teacher''s self-analysis and reflection objectively and non-judgmentally. Ten doctoral students, all experienced classroom teachers, served as peer coaches during the program's first year. Evaluation of the first year was based upon participant self-reports as well as classroom data collected by peer coaches. Outcomes are described in relation to five areas: (1) changes in thinking about teaching; (2) changes in teaching behavior; (3) benefits to students; (4) benefits to district; and (5) comparison with other inservice programs. Recommendations are made for districts that are considering the implementation of a peer coaching program. (JD0